

Mr. Ford's Page



WE WHO have found our place in life and have become matured, are sometimes inclined to forget that the young men who are coming after us are troubled by the same urge and the same questions which troubled us. Every young man who is sensitive and intelligent enough to realize that the life before him must be *made* is almost certain to pass through a period of painful searching before he finds the place which he feels will give him *his* opportunity. He knows he must work, but where? at what? He knows there is a place for him somewhere, but how can he find it?

We are likely to forget this pain of youth. We are likely to forget how earnestly we sought counsel of older folks, and how inadequate and unconvincing the counsel was when we got it. And yet young men, in spite of all their apparent difference from what we were when we were young, are really treading the same paths. The world of affairs has changed a great deal, but man has not.

It is not the intention of this article to give any of the ordinary advice to young men. There are certain things which were true a thousand years ago and will be true a thousand years hence if civilization endures that long, and which everyone knows—knows, that is, as far as *being aware* can constitute knowledge; but there is a knowledge by experience which drives the outer knowledge home and clinches it like a nail. And this experience cannot be provided for another or substituted. The best we can do in that matter is to prevent as far as possible the needless and bitter experiences which come from folly.

But perhaps it would serve a useful purpose if we answered the young man's question as to whether the new industrial conditions of the world have had an effect on his chances to achieve success in a special way; that is, whether the intensive organization of our life has not operated to close up some of the former avenues of advancement.

There is no use whatever in dealing with stale platitudes in such a matter or in giving the young man a general counsel. Certain matters must be admitted at once. There has been a change, but in what does it consist?

It is true, that more young men than ever before make their start in places prepared for them. To the young man with no influence, this looks like a disadvantage at the very outset. But he is exaggerating its importance. For one thing, those boys who drop into nice specially prepared places do not always make good; indeed, a very small percentage of them do. No man of affairs ever had enough sons or relatives to run his business. The men who are in the important places of American business concerns are not the men who began in soft berths; they are the men who showed themselves more capable than those who were born or lifted into those berths.

IT MAY also be admitted that the young man who enters industry today enters a very different system from that in which the young man of 15 or 25 years ago began his career. The system has been tightened up, there is less "play" or friction in it; fewer matters are left to the haphazard will of the individual; the modern worker finds himself part of an organization which *apparently* leaves him little initiative.

Yet, with all this, it is not true that "men are mere machines." It is not true that opportunity has been lost in organization. If the young man will liberate himself from his false ideas of this matter and regard the system for what it is, rather than for what it is not, he will find that what he thought was a barrier is really an aid.

Factory organization is not a device to prevent the expansion of ability, but a device to reduce the waste and losses due to mediocrity. It is not a device to hinder the ambitious, clear-headed man from doing his best, but a device to prevent the don't-care sort of individual from doing his worst. That is to say, when laziness, carelessness, slothfulness and lack-interest are allowed to have their

own way, everybody suffers. The factory cannot prosper and therefore cannot pay living wages. When an organization makes it necessary for the don't-care class to do better than they naturally would, it is for their benefit—they are better mentally, physically and financially. Ask yourself how much wages we should be able to pay if we trusted a large don't-care class to their own methods and gait of production. Now, the young man ought to get that idea very firmly in his mind, and he ought to look at the entire question seriously and observe the system itself intelligently to see if this is not just the way it works.

On the other hand, if the factory system which brought mediocrity up to a higher standard, operated also to keep ability down to a lower standard—it would be a very bad system, a very bad system indeed. Even a system, be it ever so perfect, must have able individuals to operate it. No system operates itself.

More brains are needed today than ever before, but perhaps they are not needed in the same place as they once were. It is just like power: formerly every machine was run by foot power; the power was right at the machine. But nowadays we have moved the power back, concentrated it in the power-house; it is no longer necessary to generate it by muscular power at the machine. Thus also we have made it unnecessary for the highest types of mental

ability to be engaged in every operation at the factory, and by doing this we have enabled men of very ordinary mental equipment to profit by the plans of men of larger mental ability, and the consequence is that everybody is producing more and enjoying more than ever before.

Everyone who knows anything and "knows that he knows"—this last is very important—begins at the beginning; that is to say, he begins wherever he is fit to begin. Where are you fit to begin? "Well," says a young fellow, "I suppose I would have to begin at the bottom." Good! It is the best place to begin and the easiest place to get away from.

BUT, remember this, you are not there to stay unless you ought to. It is really your duty to progress in order to make room for the man behind you.

But you must not think that the factory exists for the express purpose of promoting you. As long as you are there, your business is to promote the business of the factory. Then, as it advances, you go with it.

Every business that is growing is creating new places for capable men. It cannot help but do so. A settled business that is just holding its own, where someone must die or resign before there can be advancements, is necessarily slow in promotions. But growing businesses are not.

This does not mean that new openings come every day and in groups. Not at all. Ambitious young fellows often wish that chances would occur at a rate which would be simply ruinous. But it is the fellow who can stand the gaff of routine for a long time and still keep himself alive and alert in it, that will be remembered and chosen. It is not sensational brilliance we seek in our business, but sound substantial dependability day after day. Not skyrockets, but men whose sounder qualities can be depended upon.

More young men lose out through impatience than any other cause. Big enterprises of necessity move slowly and cautiously. When you become impatient, you had better lay it away for a year or two. At about the same time that you saw a certain thing ought to be done, and were irritated because it was not done, your superiors saw it too, and began to readjust affairs so that it could be done. That takes time. Don't lose your own chances by jumping out just when your advancement might have been absolutely secured by patient industry. Industry is just doing the same thing time after time with an effort to do it better. The young man with an ambition for his own future ought to take a long look ahead and leave an ample margin of time for things to happen.

CAN a young man advance as well under the modern factory system as he did under the looser, more individual systems of 20 years ago? If not, there is a defect in our system. The system is intended to take up the slack of the don't-care class, not to put a brake on ability and ambition. The present system is a great benefit to the mediocre, but it is not therefore a disadvantage to the young man who is trying to get ahead. A large business needs more men of brains than would a number of smaller concerns turning out the same aggregate amount of business.